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MAO TSE-TUNG'S PERCEPTION OF THE SOVIET UNION AS COMMUNICATED IN
THE MAO TSE-TUNG SSU-HSIANG WAN SUI! (1969)

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Kenneth Lieberthal

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PREFACE

The following analysis attempts to specify Mao Tse-tung's changing perception of the Soviet Union as revealed in the 1969 version of *Mao Tse-tung ssu-hsiang wan sui!* No systematic translation of this volume has been done, although portions of it appear in two sources: Stuart Schram (ed.), *Chairman Mao Speaks to the People* (Westminster, Md.: Pantheon, 1975); and *Miscellany of Mao Tse-tung Thought*, 2 volumes (Washington: Joint Publication Research Service, February 20, 1974, #61269-1/2). All page references in this Paper are to the original Chinese version.

I am deeply indebted to Anna Sun Ford for her excellent assistance in the research for this Paper.

This is a preliminary analysis and I have made no attempt to integrate it into the relevant data available from other sources.

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MAO TSE-TUNG'S PERCEPTION OF THE SOVIET UNION AS COMMUNICATED IN THE
MAO TSE-TUNG SSU-HSIANG WAN SUI! (1969)

Kenneth Lieberthal

The 1969 volume of *Mao Tse-tung ssu-hsiang wan sui!*¹ is the most comprehensive collection available to date of Mao Tse-tung's unpublished post-1949 speeches. While encompassing texts from 1950 to 1968, the volume's strength centers overwhelmingly on the 1956-65 period. This is not, however, a comprehensive collection of Mao's speeches and writings even for 1956-65. Selectivity seems to have been exercised so as to portray a relatively moderate Party Chairman, one who believes in the enthusiasm of the masses but never loses sight of the need to accompany popular mobilization with strong organizational leadership and the concomitant necessity of retaining a sober awareness of the weaknesses as well as the virtues of China's populace. Thus, for instance, this volume omits Mao's talk at the August 1958 Peitaiho Conference, where by all accounts he waxed euphoric over the Great Leap Forward,² but it includes all of his major speeches of late 1958 and 1959 on the need to tone down the Great Leap and consolidate the gains already made.³ The fact that this volume first circulated in 1969, during a period of radical consolidation of the Cultural Revolution, helps explain the basis for this selectivity. An authoritative Chinese official in a conversation with Professor Allen Whiting asserted that the texts of the

¹ *Long Live the Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, put together in 1969 and never officially published in China. This volume became available in the West in 1973 via Taiwan intelligence sources.

² The text of this speech has never been made public and its content is inferred from articles in the Chinese press at the time.

³ Some of these, especially the Chairman's speeches at the 1959 Second Chengchow conference, highlight how far to the "right" Mao had gone by early 1959--farther than previous documentation has suggested.

speeches in this volume are basically accurate ("some are stenographic notes that have not been reviewed by Mao for errors") but that the volume itself is the product of "factional" politics in the PRC.⁴ He thus obliquely confirmed the biased nature of the picture of Mao presented in this volume.

This brief paper analyzes Mao Tse-tung's changing conception of the USSR as revealed by the materials in this extraordinarily rich collection of writings.⁵ Since this volume was put together at a time of great tension in Sino-Soviet relations, we must briefly consider the degree to which the picture of Mao's remarks regarding the USSR has been distorted, as were his domestic policy recommendations, in the selection of documents. Two facts suggest that editorial selectivity aimed far more at domestic pronouncements than at foreign policy in general and Soviet affairs in particular. First, materials on foreign affairs as a whole were only sparingly permitted to leak into the public domain during the Cultural Revolution, in sharp contrast to the *relatively* unrestricted plundering of archival records regarding certain aspects of domestic policy.⁶ Thus, it seems likely that the compilers of this volume⁷ had to choose among documents made available because they concerned key aspects of domestic policy, and the comments on foreign policy issues usually crept in more as appendages than as the viscera of the presentations. Secondly, the

⁴ This conversation took place in Peking in October 1975.

⁵ The volume runs over 700 pages in Chinese.

⁶ Some domestic policy spheres--such as public security--remained out of bounds to the Red Guards.

⁷ These are anonymous, but they almost certainly represent a faction within the government or Party bureaucracy toward the end of the Cultural Revolution.

image of the USSR presented in these documents is by no means uniformly hostile, and in some instances is even more conciliatory than that conveyed by the public media of the time.⁸ Indeed, these documents reveal that Mao retained a rather complex set of ideas regarding the USSR; at the same time, they demonstrate quite conclusively that the Chinese Party Chairman's core assumptions about the Soviet system changed dramatically over the period 1958-1962.⁹

The following inquiry focuses on Mao's perceptions of the Soviet system itself and the implications of his changing perceptions in this sphere for Sino-Soviet relations. As of 1955, Mao explicitly regarded the Soviet system as both socialist and a model for building socialism, even if one that should be evaluated critically. By 1969 he viewed this same system as a new form of imperialism--called "social imperialism" in the Chinese media--and eschewed it both as either model or ally. What steps marked this transition, when did they occur, and what were their implications, as Mao articulated them, for Sino-Soviet relations? The documents in *Long Live the Thought of Mao Tse-tung!* (1969) suggest the following answers to these questions.¹⁰

During 1956-spring 1958, Mao became increasingly concerned with the need for China to develop a distinctive approach to the building of

⁸For instance, Mao in January 1962 still affirms the need to learn from some positive aspects of the Soviet model--see below.

⁹Thus, these documents give little solace, for instance, to those who have argued that Mao "had it in" for the Soviets since the 1930's, since 1945, since 1949, or since any of the numerous other dates that have been specified as the time when Mao finally realized the irredeemably perfidious nature of the Soviet system and its leadership.

¹⁰The public media and other available collections of Mao's writings and speeches obviously comprise important additional sources of information on these same questions.

socialism. Khrushchev's de-Stalinization speech simply highlighted something to which Mao had already developed a sensitivity--the inapplicability of certain aspects of the Soviet model to China's specific conditions. Thus, during this period Mao increasingly wrestled with the problem of distinguishing those aspects of the Soviet model that China should emulate from those that the PRC should discard in favor of a more distinctive Chinese system. Mao's quest during these years included critical remarks concerning tactical errors in, for instance, Soviet foreign policy (January 1957),¹¹ personal and specific aspects of Khrushchev's leadership (January 1957),¹² the heavy handedness of Soviet internal policy (April 1957),¹³ and so forth. Mao concluded that, while China had and would continue to have much to learn from the Soviet experience, the PRC must take a critical rather than mechanical approach to absorbing and applying this experience (March 10, 1958).¹⁴

Perhaps Mao's views at this time are best summed up in a March 10, 1958 speech, in which he predicted that China would need over time to learn less from the USSR as the PRC acquired more knowledge itself. The "Ten Great Relationships,"¹⁵ he added, was the blueprint for Chinese development--it is uniquely Chinese, and yet at the same time it incorporates the basic principles that are embodied in Soviet development.¹⁶

¹¹Pp. 82-83. All pages refer to the original Chinese edition of this volume.

¹²Pg. 84.

¹³Pg. 105.

¹⁴Pg. 161.

¹⁵Written in April 1956--text in Stuart Schram (ed.), *Chairman Mao Talks to the People* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), pp. 61-83.

¹⁶Pp. 162-63.

These views of the Chairman regarding the Soviet experience began to change in significant ways as of the spring of 1958. Specifically, on March 20, 1958 Mao commented that the Soviets "have discarded some (essential elements) of Leninism, (they are) becoming lethargic."¹⁷ His analysis at this time suggested that the Soviet Union had become too complacent and that this complacency itself reflected the development of the USSR into a mighty industrial power. Mao argued, essentially, that success in industrialization produces arrogance, rigidity, and complacency--and he articulated his fear that this may in fact preview China's future also.¹⁸ From this time forward, we find Mao appealing beyond the current Soviet leadership directly back to Stalin, or more often to Lenin and Marx, for ideological legitimation.¹⁹

This increasing sensitivity to the changing nature of Soviet society and the ideological failings of the current Soviet leadership led Mao to heightened awareness of the national security implications of these developments for China. In September 1959, for instance,²⁰ Mao stressed (in relation to the P'eng Teh-huai affair) that it is intolerable to allow foreign Communist parties to meddle in Chinese Communist Party affairs. Mao thus seems to have concluded by late 1959 that the Soviet Union had become an advanced industrial society; that this in turn had skewed the USSR's foreign and domestic policies; that the Soviet leadership

¹⁷ Pg. 166.

¹⁸ Pg. 169.

¹⁹ For instance in May 1958: pp. 194-99, 216.

²⁰ Pg. 316.

had become ideologically deviant; and that the Soviet Union had attempted to meddle in the Chinese Communist Party (and would probably continue to do so?).

The national security aspects of Mao's analysis become more pronounced during 1960. For instance, in his talk of March 22, 1960,²¹ the Chairman noted that revisionists and semi-revisionists within the international Communist movement comprised one of the three types of people who vociferously opposed China. Indeed Mao hinted obliquely at this time that there might be some concern about a Soviet armed attack on China and indicated that Communist party revisionists would intermittently attack China for many years to come. These remarks stand in sharp contrast to Mao's earlier comments during 1956-1958 and even in 1959, which at no time hinted that the Soviet Union actively collaborated with the imperialists or might pose a security threat of any type to China. The concern during the earlier period focused, rather, on the appropriateness of various aspects of the Soviet model and the correctness of Soviet tactics in particular situations, and it extended eventually to Soviet meddling in Chinese politics. By contrast, the discussions of March of 1960, however, clearly assume that the Soviets are *not* allies in the international scene and regard the Soviets, indeed, as possible enemies.

Little information in this volume elucidates Mao's views during 1961-1962 other than his comments on the Soviet *Textbook on Political Economy*,²² which purportedly were written during these years. The comments on the *Textbook*, while extensive, on the whole say little

²¹Pp. 316-18.

²²Pp. 319-398.

about the potential aggressiveness of the Soviet Union against China. There is, however, an important thread of the argument that does preview Mao's later conclusions that the Soviet system had degenerated into first bureaucratic-capitalism and then social-imperialism.

Mao argues in these "notes" that there is a continuing class struggle in the Soviet Union of which the Soviet leaders are unaware. The system may change its class nature because it stresses individual incentives without due sensitivity to the fact that capitalist tendencies and capitalist influences remain strong for a long period of time after a socialist system has been set up.²³ These structural flaws extend even to the system of one-man management, which Mao regards as indistinguishable from practice in capitalist countries.²⁴ Thus, the Soviet system is structurally vulnerable to degeneration into some form of bureaucratic capitalism. Soviet views on the international scene, moreover, suggest to Mao that this degeneration is already well advanced. Moscow's dual stress on the non-inevitability of war and the desirability of disarmament²⁵ indicates that the USSR has ceased to view the international arena from a proletarian class perspective and, Mao implies, has become something other than socialist. The major specific propositions of Mao's argument are as follows:

- 1) The Soviets incorrectly believe that a particular stage of development can be consolidated (i.e., cannot change as a

²³Pp. 381-4.

²⁴Pg. 353.

²⁵Pg. 340.

function of internal contradictions).²⁶ Relatedly, the Soviet leaders do not recognize the continuing contradictions between two levels of ownership in the Soviet Union (ownership by the whole people and collective ownership).²⁷ It is in fact the contradictions between these two levels of ownership that continue to drive Soviet social development forward;

- 2) The Soviets do not fully appreciate the general importance of the superstructure and the role of the superstructure in effecting changes in the substructure.²⁸ Thus, for instance, they do not understand the very serious ramifications of maintaining a system of individual incentives as pervasive as that extent in the USSR. Through piece work forms of remuneration, the Soviets cater too much to individual interests,²⁹ and this *de facto* keeps alive the class struggle between socialism (with its emphasis upon collectivism) and capitalism (with its emphasis on individual advancement) in the Soviet Union.³⁰
- 3) The Soviet system of individual material incentives stems in turn from a fundamental misconception about how to speed up production development under socialism. Indeed, to rely on the distribution of consumer goods to speed up the development

²⁶Pg. 338.

²⁷Pp. 336, 347.

²⁸Pp. 334-46.

²⁹Pp. 358, 367. This current stress on material incentives is in fact a reaction to an over-stress on collectivism under Stalin, and will eventually produce its reaction: pg. 371.

³⁰Pp. 381-4.

of production under socialism amounts to no less than "revisionism of the correct Marxist outlook."³¹

- 4) The orientation of any country is determined by its social system. A socialist system predisposes one to oppose imperialism.³²
- 5) Those who believe war can be eliminated while imperialism exists are "devoid of Marxism-Leninism."³³ And the same is true for those who propose disarmament in view of the fact that weapons are themselves an expression of the international class struggle.³⁴

In sum, the Soviet leaders have relied on individual material rewards to develop production, *oblivious* to the fact that in so doing they continue to nurture the seeds of capitalism in Soviet society. Class struggle thus continues in the USSR, and recent Soviet activities in the international arena indicate that the anti-socialist forces are in the ascent in Moscow.

Mao's few available speeches during 1962 flesh out and confirm the above analysis. His January 30, 1962 speech at an Enlarged Central Work Conference hints somewhat obliquely³⁵ that the Soviet Union has now become a "capitalist country. . .a reactionary fascist dictatorship." In this speech, he lists the enemies of the revolutionary masses throughout the world as falling into three categories:³⁶ imperialism,

³¹Pp. 357, 362-3.

³²Pg. 378.

³³Pg. 340.

³⁴Pg. 340.

³⁵Pp. 406-7.

³⁶Pp. 408-9, 418.

reactionaries, and revisionism. The Soviets have joined the Yugoslavs in that last category, as Mao confirms³⁷ that the Soviet party and state leadership has been usurped by the revisionists. The Chairman nevertheless maintains³⁸ the continuing need both to learn from the good experiences of the Soviet Union and to absorb lessons by negative example from their defeats.

By mid-August, 1962 Mao had removed all doubt as to the nature of the Soviet Union internally and the role it had assumed in the international arena. He asserted³⁹ that "revisionism still exists in the Soviet Union" and accused the Soviets of catering to the interests of international capitalism. The Soviets had become, in short, "counter-revolutionaries." Mao at the same time cited the USSR to demonstrate that capitalism could indeed be restored in socialist societies. These themes surfaced again in his September 24, 1962, speech to the Tenth Plenum of the 8th CC. Here⁴⁰ Mao interpreted class struggle within the socialist camp as a question concerning "struggles between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between Marxism-Leninism and anti-Marxism-Leninism, between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism." He further mentioned the contradictions between the world's people and revisionism as one of a number of contradictions characterizing contemporary international relations.

The 1969 *Long Live the Thought of Mao Tse-tung* contains almost no comments by the Chairman on the nature of the Soviet system during 1963.

³⁷ Pg. 418.

³⁸ Pg. 418.

³⁹ Pg. 424.

⁴⁰ Pg. 433.

The sole exception⁴¹ notes that "the Soviets have ceased to carry out class struggle since 1938," without which, Mao laments, "the dictatorship of the proletariat is deprived of a reliable social foundation." By 1964, however, Mao introduced a distinctly new and important element into his analysis of the Soviet Union in international relations. On February 13 of that year,⁴² Mao referred to the threatening posture of *colluding* imperialist and revisionist forces in the international arena. In this context he mentioned a potential nuclear strike against China. In March he reiterated that "it is the bourgeoisie who is in power in the Soviet Union today, it is Khrushchev who is in power."⁴³ Relatedly, he remarked that the struggle against imperialism and revisionism constituted China's current major concerns.⁴⁴ By May 11, 1964, Mao characterized the Soviet Union as follows: "The Soviet Union today is a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, a dictatorship of big capitalists, a Hitler-type Fascist dictatorship, they are all hooligans, they are worse than DeGaulle."⁴⁵

A June 16, 1964 comment by Mao suggests that he was still anticipating--at least in the near future--a higher probability of war with the imperialists than that with the revisionists. He observed⁴⁶ that "when war breaks out it is up to China to sustain (its own defense),

⁴¹ Pg. 441.

⁴² Pg. 455.

⁴³ Pg. 466.

⁴⁴ Pg. 472.

⁴⁵ Pg. 496.

⁴⁶ Pg. 501.

it is impossible to rely on the revisionists." Thus, he no longer saw the Soviet nuclear umbrella or conventional support as of any significance, but he did still regard war with the imperialists rather than the revisionists as the most likely scenario.

On June 18, 1964, Mao returned to the question of collusion and drew an important distinction--namely, that while revisionism does not oppose imperialism⁴⁷ and indeed colludes with it, contradictions between revisionism and imperialism remain and contradictions also exist among various revisionist parties.⁴⁸ Thus, as early as mid-1964 Mao conceived of the relationship between revisionism and imperialism as one of both collusion and contention. He at that time recognized the need to break up U.S.-Soviet collusion, warning on July 10, 1964,⁴⁹ for instance, against the danger of U.S.-Soviet world domination through such collusion. During this same talk, Mao voiced his concern⁵⁰ that the Soviet Union coveted Chinese territory in Sinkiang and Heilungkiang.

Mao Tse-tung thus by mid-1964 fully recognized the national security threat the USSR posed to China, although Moscow's actual large-scale troop and weapons deployments to the Soviet Far East did not begin until 1965. Mao perceived this threat as the inevitable excrescence of an internal degeneration of the Soviet system and specified it in terms of either a possible nuclear strike against the PRC or territorial designs on Chinese Sinkiang or Heilungkiang. He, moreover, had already

⁴⁷Pg. 511.

⁴⁸Pg. 514.

⁴⁹Pg. 539.

⁵⁰Pp. 540-1.

developed the intellectual framework that at the end of the decade would serve as the basis for China's opening to the West--i.e., that the USSR both colluded and contended with the United States, the latter providing an opening wedge for diminishing the Soviet-American threat through adroit diplomatic maneuvering.

The 1969 *Mao Tse-tung ssu-hsiang wan-sui!* collection thus provides important substantive information on Mao Tse-tung's changing perceptions of the nature of Soviet society and the concomitant relationship of the Soviet and Chinese politics. A great deal of material already analyzed and published in the West,⁵¹ however, must be brought to bear to place the above outline in fuller historical context. In addition, Mao's views as summarized above even as late as 1964 left a multitude of questions unanswered concerning the immediacy of the Soviet challenge, the specific forms it would eventually assume, the means by which Soviet-American contradictions could be exploited most profitably by China, and, most fundamentally, the magnitude of the Soviet threat as compared with that posed by the major imperialist power that glared at China from across the Pacific. Analysts must look to the materials on China during and after the Cultural Revolution for the answers to these critical questions.

⁵¹ Donald Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict*; William Griffith, *The Sino-Soviet Rift*; William Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations, 1964-1965*; Alexander Dallin, *Diversity in International Communism*; and Lowenthal, Hudson and MacFarquhar, *The Sino-Soviet Dispute*, to name only a few of the more prominent studies.